Subject: Re: more fact-checking on deadline
From: Ruben Alonzo <ralonzo@excelenciacharteracademy.org>
Date: 9/21/18, 7:57 PM
To: "Blume, Howard" <Howard.Blume@latimes.com>
CC: "jsong@greatpublicschoolsnow.org" <jsong@greatpublicschoolsnow.org>

Responses below.

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 21, 2018, at 7:42 PM, Blume, Howard <Howard.Blume@latimes.com> wrote:

> Thanks, Ruben.
>
> I will makes a few tweaks accordingly.
>
> This idea of being an uncertified but full time, career teacher in Texas (and making a lower wage because of it) is beyond my experience zone. Things works a little differently in California. That's interesting, and I know there's a longer interesting story attached to all of that.

Interesting indeed. To be brief, rural education presents its own challenges. Population of my hometown is 8,000. At the time of his career, if you removed all uncertified teachers my school would not have had a workforce to teach students. The cost of a credential/program always presented a barrier to entry each year for my father and my family.

> Was your master's a joint program completed at Columbia *and* Harvard and thus you earned a combined degree at both schools? Or separate master's at both schools?

Separate. Harvard: Adolescent development. Columbia: school leadership. Received degrees two years apart.

> My main point in this part was merely to establish that you are an impressive young man. I don't need to say everything, just enough to get that point across. Harvard and MIT still impress people so that makes the point effectively. I don't need to pile on with Columbia. Brevity is good. However, if mentioning Harvard (and not Columbia) creates an error, because it misstates a joint degree, for example, then I need to phrase differently.

Thank you and I appreciate you profiling our school as well as the challenges. I believe it's important to share with the greater educational community in the city.

> Does that make sense?

Makes sense. Have a great weekend, Howard!

> --hb
>
> ---
>
> **From:** Ruben Alonzo [mailto:ralonzo@excelenciacharteracademy.org]
> **Sent:** Friday, September 21, 2018 7:33 PM
> **To:** Blume, Howard
> **Cc:** jsong@greatpublicschoolsnow.org
> **Subject:** Re: more fact-checking on deadline
>
> Responses included in your email. Can't highlight text in different color so you may need to dig below.
>
> Sent from my iPhone
>
> On Sep 21, 2018, at 11:43 AM, Blume, Howard <Howard.Blume@latimes.com> wrote:
>
>> Ruben,
>>
>> This is very helpful. Journalism can be a painstaking and frustrating process, as Jason could tell you. We end up having to do much more reporting than ever gets into story because you don't always know in which direction things will lead. And you never know precisely what a succession of editors will decide is important or not.
>>
>> A reporter learns to play defense – and try to gather any information that he can anticipate an editor is going to ask about. And the reporter rarely thinks of everything. So, that and the inevitable need to double-check and clarify for understanding leads to a lot of fact-checking.
>>
>> I suspect that this sometimes painful process is partly what drove Jason out of journalism, although he was very good at it.
>>
>> All of this is prelude to a few more granular, even clinical, questions that I'm hoping you can help with.
>>
>> Just so I'm clear: The two students from Sunrise have moved over since the start of the school year, correct? (I would imagine, for example, that

> many of your students come from the Sunrise attendance area and could have been Sunrise students in the broader sense of the word.)

No. Only one returned. The other is still enrolled with us. Mother doesn't plan on unenrolling. I also imagine others students may have been zoned to Sunrise but only two were officially enrolled with them last year that chose to enroll with us. Again, only one returned.

I think you started the year with 68 students, so what happened to lower the number to 59? For example, did you have commitments for 68 students but some of those never turned up, but were on the roll sheets at the start of the year?

100% turned up day one of school. With the exception of the student who returned to Sunrise and another who was accepted off waitlist at local KIPP elementary, every student we "lost" was due to the family moving. We held exit interviews with each family. They loved the program, staff, and experience. However, distance was too far away from new homes.

(I can see an editor asking me to explain the difference between 68 and 59, and currently I don't have an explanation. I have a similar challenge with the numbers from Sunrise, by the way.)

> Here is some additional routine fact-checking (Please note there is one question below in all caps). Please mark any corrections ***very clearly***:

1. You are 29.

Correct.

2. You majored in and earned a degree in economics at MIT.

With a concentration in education.

3. You got a master's in education at Harvard.

And at Columbia University.

4. Your professional teaching experience is two years teaching at a charter school in Texas.

Correct.

5. Then you became an assistant principal at that same charter.

Correct.

6. FOR HOW LONG WERE YOU AN ASSSISTANT PRINCIPAL AT THIS SCHOOL?

Two years.

7. Outside of this professional experience, you have a total of 10 years of

experience in tutoring, mentoring students, student teaching and thinking and learning about education.

Correct.

8. Starting a school has been a longtime dream.

Correct.

9. You grew up in Texas.

Except for summers in North Dakota where we worked in the fields as migrant farm workers.

10. Your father worked as a fulltime substitute teacher during the school year.

He was a full time uncertified teacher. Based on the lack of certification he earned roughly a substitute's wages.

11. He was a seasonal farmworker during the summer months.

We all were. Not just him.

12. The posters on the teacher's car, which had the pictures of the staff, claimed that the charter teachers lacked adequate experience and credentials. (Note: We are talking only about the *claim*, not the facts.)

Correct.

13. Ms. Duncanson delivered a petition with 400 signatures to Excelencia's Board of Directors, asking the school to go elsewhere.

Cannot confirm. I don't have the info on hand.

14. You expect Excelencia's instructional approach to stand out in part by its emphasis on writing.

...emphasis on literacy and character development.

15. Teachers also will focus on helping students to learn how to give 100% of their attention to the teacher and to their learning.

And to become leaders in their community.

(Note: A description of the school's attributes/philosophy is inevitably going to be a shorthand and incomplete. The goal is to give a brief sense of something that might make the school different or special. It could be something else, and if you prefer something else, I would consider changing what I have. But whatever we use has to be jargon-free, readily understandable and make sense in context.)

Thanks again for your patience and diligence. There could be a few more questions before the end of the day.

--hb

From: Ruben Alonzo [mailto:ralonzo@excelenciacharteracademy.org]
Sent: Thursday, September 20, 2018 4:40 PM
To: Blume, Howard
Cc: jsong@greatpublicschoolsnow.org
Subject: RE: more fact-checking

Hi Howard,

- As of last Friday, 59 enrolled. 120 intended target.
- Police officers were present for first three days of instruction. I wanted them there as a precaution in case protesters became as hostile toward my families as they have been towards me at various community events and board meetings.
- I did ask police officers about towing her vehicle. She yelled at them when they approached her. They chose not to tow despite clearly posted signs saying No Parking weekdays starting at 7am. We open our doors at 7am.
- We enrolled two families from Sunrise. They wanted a better education for their children. One reenrolled at Sunrise last week. He was a first grader (and only child) who missed his friends.

Ruben Alonzo | Founder | Excelencia Charter Academy |
213.880.3904 | www.excelenciacharteracademy.org
<image002.jpg>

From: Blume, Howard <Howard.Blume@latimes.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 20, 2018 2:45 PM
To: Ruben Alonzo <ralonzo@excelenciacharteracademy.org>
Cc: jsong@greatpublicschoolsnow.org
Subject: more fact-checking

Ruben –

I understand the reason for your lower enrollment and intend to explain it, but what was your original target enrollment for this year? My notes from our conversation say you got about half as many students as you would have preferred, but I'm wondering now if that is precisely correct.

Also, my notes have something in there about police officers coming down to observe the protest in front of the school. Ms. Duncanson actually says the same thing. She said officers were there more than once, but that they never intervened. Things never got to that point.

Does that sound right to you?

She also says that you attempted at one point to have her car towed from that spot in front of the entrance (not that I blame you), but that the car could not be towed

> because there no enforceable violations. To what extent is that correct?
>
> Ms. Duncanson also claims that one or more students from your charter has left to return to Sunrise. Is that true? Perhaps the opposite could be true. Are you getting any students who started off in Sunrise
>
> What was your enrollment was of last Friday?
>
> Also, I had brunch with Richard Garcia of CCSA today and he seemed to think that the protests against your school were, at some point, caught up in the anti-gentrification activism, which he thought was entirely unfair to your school. Do you recall that gentrification ever come up in these protests? If so, was this from neighborhood activists or just one more argument from the more active members of the Sunrise staff?
>
> Any other developments?
>
> Please stay tuned for more possible fact-checking. And thanks for your patience.
>
> --hb